



Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

Working for public policy that supports the social, economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources and rural communities

Conservation and Environment Policy Options for the 2007 Farm Bill

Why Now?

The modern era of conservation policy that began in 1985 and continued expanding in the 2002 Farm Bill must now enter a new phase. Conservation in federal farm policy can no longer be a secondary option. Conservation should take a new, primary role in light of a confluence of factors that include soaring unmet farmer demand for conservation programs, the destructive economic pressures of traditional production subsidies, international trade rules, and the building urgency of an agro-ecosystem moving out of balance. Agricultural policy should reward greater resource protection that enables continued production, rather than greater production that places our natural resources at risk. Rural America needs this shift to occur now, before more economic and environmental ground is lost to the status quo in federal farm policy.

What We Need

Effective federal farm policy should advance the widely-supported goals of fostering family farms and ranches and environmental enhancement. In our view, a key to this policy objective will be a comprehensive stewardship incentives system that includes, at its heart, an expanded and streamlined **Conservation Security Program (CSP)**.



Farmer and ranchers can help provide healthy soils, clean water and good habitat with the right support. The CSP supports conservation on farms and ranches of all types in all regions, and comprehensively addresses soil, water, wildlife, energy and other resources of a healthy agricultural system. It can be complemented with strong conservation compliance rules, cooperative conservation partnerships, and a strong mix of other stewardship incentive options and conservation easement programs.

Act Now

Ask your Senators and Member of Congress to pass a new farm bill now, without delay. Urge them to support the Conservation Security Program as the comprehensive, national base program for working land conservation. See other side for specific and additional proposals.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION
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• **Conservation Security Program:** The CSP should be retained as the primary stewardship incentives program to reward superior conservation systems on land in agricultural production. An adequate and protected funding mechanism should be provided to ensure implementation of a true nationwide program serving all of agriculture on a regular basis. The payment structure should be streamlined, and environmental standards kept high, with a stronger focus on sustainable and organic farming system approaches to comprehensive conservation and environmental enhancement.

• **Environmental Quality Incentives Program:** EQIP should be amended to restore provisions that ensured that its overall effects on the environment are positive, including a reasonable payment limitation. The cap should not be greater than \$150,000 in any 5-year period. Payments should not be made to build or expand confined industrial livestock facilities. These measures will provide for a more equitable distribution of EQIP funding and prevent abuse.

• **Cooperative Conservation Partnerships:** The current Farm Bill's Partnership and Cooperation Initiative should be reauthorized as the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) and significantly strengthened. The new CCPI will support special projects through which multiple producers will address specific natural resource concerns or community development opportunities in partnership with state agencies, producer associations, non-governmental organizations, and other entities. The full range of resource concerns should be eligible and the program should be administered primarily through the State Natural Resources Conservation Service offices.

• **Conservation Title General Provisions:** The 2007 Farm Bill presents an opportunity to strengthen the entire conservation portfolio by expanding and adding specific general provisions to establish some broad ground rules and create a stronger foundation for addressing critical agro-environmental issues in a more comprehensive and cost-effective fashion. As part of this effort, the Resource Conservation Act should be reauthorized and funding provided for monitoring and evaluation activities.

• **Conservation Compliance:** The conservation compliance regime should be re-linked to the crop insurance program and expanded to cover all cropland eroding at unsustainable rates. Waiver guidelines should be strengthened

and waivers made subject to independent review. A "sodsaver" provision should be enacted that prohibits program benefits on all native prairie and permanent grasslands which are converted to cropping.

• **Wetlands Reserve Program:** The WRP should be retained with an enrollment directive of not less than 250,000 acres per year nationwide, with a strong priority for permanent easements. We also support offering incentives to landowners to allow public access to the land as part of community development plans for hunting, fishing, hiking, birding, and other public recreational amenities.

• **Conservation Reserve Program:** The CRP should be retained as a land retirement program, with improvements to the environmental benefits index. In light of the repeated renewal of many CRP contracts on environmentally sensitive land, voluntary long-term and permanent conservation easements on particularly environmentally sensitive land should be added as a new CRP option. At least 7 million acres, or 20 percent of total CRP acreage, whichever is greater, should be reserved for conservation buffer enrollments through the CCRP or CREP.

• **Agricultural-Based Energy Conservation and Production Sustainability Criteria:** Sustainability criteria should guide all conservation and energy title programs that seek to promote renewable energy. Within each program, evaluation and ranking criteria used to make individual grants and loans should also use the same basic set of sustainability criteria.



For SAC's full Farm Bill Platform and for more information, see www.msawg.org